

Chairman Heinert and members of the House Education committee.

I brought this bill to the legislature because **SB 2330** is an essential step in our fight against human trafficking and exploitation by bringing education and awareness in our schools.

As amended, this bill ensures that students in **grades 4 through 12** receive annual, evidence-based instruction on recognizing, preventing, and reporting human trafficking. By equipping young people with the knowledge to identify warning signs, we empower them to protect themselves and others from exploitation. **This legislation gets in front of the problem before the damage is done. Human trafficking is a crime that thrives in silence and misunderstanding. Almost all individuals who became victims did not recognize they were being trafficked until it was too late. Traffickers manipulate, groom, and exploit vulnerabilities, often posing as trusted friends, romantic partners, or even authority figures. They take advantage of the fact that most young people—and even adults—do not understand the warning signs of trafficking until they are trapped.**

Some of the DECEPTIONS TRAFFICKERS USE ON STUDENTS: If students don't know what human trafficking is, they won't know they are being trafficked.

1 **"This is love."** Groomers manipulate young minds, making them believe they are in a romantic relationship.

2 **"You can trust me, not your parents."** Traffickers create distrust between children and guardians.

3 **"You're mature for your age."** They prey on a child's desire for independence and validation.

4 **"This is normal."** Many victims don't realize they're being exploited because no one taught them what trafficking looks like.

North Dakota schools are on the front lines of this crisis and must equip students with the tools to recognize and report trafficking. I urge you to support legislation mandating age-appropriate human trafficking prevention education for grades 4-12, ensuring that:

1. Students learn the tactics traffickers use, so they can recognize red flags early.
2. Teachers and school staff receive training to identify and report signs of grooming.
3. Schools implement trauma-informed reporting systems to protect students at risk.
4. Prevention programs include digital safety education to address online trafficking tactics.
 - The average age of a trafficked child is 12-14 years old—this means traffickers are targeting students in middle and high school.
 - Online exploitation is increasing. 55% of minors report being contacted by strangers online inappropriately.
 - Schools are key to prevention. Teachers, coaches, and counselors are often the first line of defense for a child in danger.

By integrating human trafficking prevention into school curricula, we protect future generations from the same fate so many have suffered in silence.

The key provisions of this bill include:

1. **Age-Appropriate Education:** Instruction will be tailored to different grade levels, covering the tactics used by traffickers, the dangers of online exploitation, and the impact of human trafficking on individuals and communities.
2. **Community Engagement:** Resources will be made available for parents and guardians to strengthen the protective network around our children, ensuring they, too, understand the risks and warning signs.
3. **Flexibility in Implementation:** Schools will have the ability to collaborate with nonprofit organizations specializing in trafficking prevention, ensuring high-quality education and outreach. **Some institutions are concerned about the cost of implementation. That is why flexibility is built into the bill—schools can utilize free services from third-party organizations, and the structure of the program allows institutions to implement the education in a way that best fits their local needs. There are no time constraints, only information items that need to be dispensed.**

Human trafficking is not just a problem somewhere else—it is happening in North Dakota, and the most frequently targeted population is our Native American population, followed by the immigrants in our state. Traffickers do not care about state lines, rural or urban settings, or socioeconomic status. They target anyone they believe they can exploit. We must acknowledge this reality and take action to protect our most vulnerable. Raising awareness is one of the most effective tools we have in combating this crime. Education can prevent victimization before it happens.

The amendment includes a **\$48,000** initial appropriation to launch the program, reflecting our commitment to ensuring its effective implementation. If we can disrupt just a few instances of human trafficking it would be worth 100 times what any institution would have to spend on this education due to the damage human trafficking does to an individual's future life. This is a small but vital investment in the safety and future of North Dakota's children.

Members of the Education committee, this bill is about **prevention, protection, and empowerment**. We can stand up for the children and young people of our state, to ensure they have the knowledge they need to stay safe, and to send a clear message that North Dakota will not tolerate human trafficking in any form.

I urge your support for **Senate Bill No. 2330** and ask for a **do pass in committee** to protect our children and prevent human trafficking before it takes hold.